



In our eat-and-run, massive-portion-sized culture, maintaining a healthy weight can be tough—and losing weight, even tougher. If you’ve tried and failed to lose weight before, you may believe that diets don’t work for you. You’re probably right: traditional diets don’t work—at least not in the long term. However, there are plenty of small but powerful ways to avoid common dieting pitfalls, achieve lasting weight loss success, and develop a healthier relationship with food.

### **The key to successful, healthy weight loss**

Your weight is a balancing act, but the equation is simple: If you eat more calories than you burn, you gain weight. And if you eat fewer calories than you burn, you lose weight.

Since 3,500 calories equals about one pound of fat, if you cut 500 calories from your typical diet each day, you’ll lose approximately one pound a week

(500 calories x 7 days = 3,500 calories). Simple, right? Then why is weight loss so hard?

All too often, we make weight loss much more difficult than it needs to be with extreme diets that leave us cranky and starving, unhealthy lifestyle choices that undermine our dieting efforts, and emotional eating habits that stop us before we get started. But there’s a better way! You can lose weight without feeling miserable. By making smart choices every day, you can develop new eating habits and preferences that will leave you feeling satisfied—and winning the battle of the bulge.

## **Getting started with healthy weight loss**

While there is no “one size fits all” solution to permanent healthy weight loss, the following guidelines are a great place to start:

Think lifestyle change, not short-term diet. Permanent weight loss is not something that a “quick-fix” diet can achieve. Instead, think about weight loss as a permanent lifestyle change—a commitment to your health for life. Various popular diets can help jumpstart your weight loss, but permanent changes in your lifestyle and food choices are what will work in the long run.

Find a cheering section. Social support means a lot. Programs like Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers use group support to impact weight loss and lifelong healthy eating. Seek out support—whether in the form of family, friends, or a support group—to get the encouragement you need.

Slow and steady wins the race. Aim to lose one to two pounds a week to ensure healthy weight loss. Losing weight too fast can take a toll on your mind and body, making you feel sluggish, drained, and sick. When you drop a lot of weight quickly, you’re actually losing mostly water and muscle, rather than fat.

Set goals to keep you motivated. Short-term goals, like wanting to fit into a bikini for the summer, usually don’t work as well as wanting to feel more confident or become healthier for your children’s sakes. When frustration and temptation strike, concentrate on the many benefits you will reap from being healthier and leaner.

Use tools that help you track your progress. Keep a food journal and weigh yourself regularly, keeping track of each pound and inch you lose. By keeping track of your weight loss efforts, you’ll see the results in black and white, which will help you stay motivated.

Keep in mind it may take some experimenting to find the right diet for your individual body. It’s important that you feel satisfied so that you can stick with it on a long-term basis. If one diet plan doesn’t work, then try another one. There are many ways to lose weight. The key is to find what works for you.

## **Where you carry your fat matters**

The health risks are greater if you tend to carry your weight around your abdomen, as opposed to your hips and thighs. A lot of belly fat is stored deep below the skin surrounding the abdominal organs and liver, and is closely linked to insulin resistance and diabetes. Calories obtained from fructose (found in sugary beverages such as soda and processed foods like doughnuts, muffins, and candy) are more likely to add to this dangerous fat around your belly. Cutting back on sugary foods can mean a slimmer waistline and lower risk of disease.

## **Healthy dieting and weight loss tip #1: Avoid common pitfalls**

Diets, especially fad diets or “quick-fix” pills and plans, often set you up for failure because:

**You feel deprived.** Diets that cut out entire groups of food, such as carbs or fat, are simply impractical, not to mention unhealthy. The key is moderation.

**You lose weight, but can’t keep it off.** Diets that severely cut calories, restrict certain foods, or rely on ready-made meals might work in the short term but don’t include a plan for maintaining your weight, so the pounds quickly come back.

**After your diet, you seem to put on weight more quickly.** When you drastically restrict your food intake, your metabolism will temporarily slow down. Once you start eating normally, you’ll gain weight until your metabolism bounces back.

**You break your diet and feel too discouraged to try again.** When diets make you feel deprived, it’s easy to fall off the wagon. Healthy eating is about the big picture. An occasional splurge won’t kill your efforts.

**You lose money faster than you lose weight.** Special shakes, meals, and programs are not only expensive, but they aren’t practical for long-term weight loss.

**You feel lost when dining out.** If the food served isn’t on your specific diet plan, what can you do?

**The person on the commercial lost 30 lbs. in two months—and you haven’t.** Diet companies make a lot of grandiose promises, and most are simply unrealistic.

## **Low-carbohydrate: Quick weight loss but long-term safety questions**

Dr. Atkins' Diet Revolution launched the low-carbohydrate diet craze, focusing largely on high-protein meats and full-fat dairy products, while banishing carbohydrates such as bread, rice, and pasta. One popular permutation of the low-carb diet is the South Beach diet, which also restricts carbohydrates but favors healthier, unsaturated fats found in nuts and fish, and allows more whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

The low-carb eating strategy is based on the theory that people who eat carbohydrates take in more calories and gain weight, while people on a high-fat diet eat less and lose weight. However, low-carbohydrate diets tend to cause dehydration by shedding pounds as urine. The result is rapid weight loss, but after a few months, weight loss tends to slow and reverse, just as happens with other diets.

The American Heart Association cautions people against the Atkins diet, because it is too high in saturated fat and protein, which can be hard on the heart, kidneys, and bones. The lack of fruits and vegetables is also worrisome, because these foods tend to lower the risk of stroke, dementia, and certain cancers. Most experts believe South Beach and other, less restrictive low-carbohydrate diets offer a more reasonable approach.

## **Healthy dieting and weight loss tip #2: Put a stop to emotional eating**

We don't always eat simply to satisfy hunger. If we did, no one would be overweight. All too often, we turn to food for comfort and stress relief. When this happens, we frequently pack on pounds.

Do you reach for a snack while watching TV? Do you eat when you're stressed or bored? When you're lonely? Or to reward yourself? Recognizing your emotional eating triggers can make all the difference in your weight loss efforts:

If you eat when you're stressed, find healthier ways to calm yourself. Try exercise, yoga, meditation, or soaking in a hot bath.



If you eat when you're feeling low on energy, find other mid-afternoon pick-me-ups. Try walking around the block, listening to energizing music, or taking a short nap.

If you eat when you're lonely or bored, reach out to others instead of reaching for the refrigerator. Call a friend who makes you laugh, take your dog for a walk, or go out in public (to the library, mall, or park—anywhere there's people).

### **Healthy dieting and weight loss tip #3: Tune in when you eat**

We live in a fast-paced world where eating has become mindless. We eat on the run, at our desk while we're working, and in front of the TV screen. The result is that we consume much more than we need, often without realizing it.

Counter this tendency by practicing “mindful” eating: pay attention to what you eat, savor each bite, and choose foods that are both nourishing and enjoyable.

#### **Mindful eating weight loss tips**

Pay attention while you're eating. Instead of chowing down mindlessly, savor the experience. Eat slowly, savoring the smells and textures of your food. If your mind wanders, gently return your attention to your food and how it tastes and feels in your mouth.

Avoid distractions while eating. Try not to eat while working, watching TV, or driving. It's too easy to mindlessly overeat.

Chew your food thoroughly. Try chewing each bite 30 times before swallowing. You'll prolong the experience and give yourself more time to enjoy each bite.

Try mixing things up to force yourself to focus on the experience of eating. Try using chopsticks rather than a fork, or use your utensils with your non-dominant hand.

Stop eating before you are full. It takes time for the signal to reach your brain that you've had enough. Avoid the temptation to clean your plate. Yes, there are children starving in Africa, but your weight gain won't help them.

## **Healthy dieting and weight loss tip #4: Fill up with fruit, veggies, and fiber**

To lose weight, you have to eat fewer calories. But that doesn't necessarily mean you have to eat less food. You can fill up while on a diet, as long as you choose your foods wisely.

### **Fiber: the secret to feeling satisfied while losing weight**

High-fiber foods are higher in volume and take longer to digest, which makes them filling. There's nothing magic about it, but the weight-loss results may seem like it.

High-fiber heavyweights include:

Fruits and vegetables – Enjoy whole fruits across the rainbow (strawberries, apples, oranges, berries, nectarines, plums), leafy salads, and green veggies of all kinds.

Beans – Select beans of any kind (black beans, lentils, split peas, pinto beans, chickpeas). Add them to soups, salads, and entrees, or enjoy them as a hearty dish on their own.

Whole grains – Try high-fiber cereal, oatmeal, brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, whole-wheat or multigrain bread, and air-popped popcorn.

### **Focus on fresh fruits and veggies**

Counting calories and measuring portion sizes can quickly become tedious, but you don't need an accounting degree to enjoy fresh fruit and vegetables. It's generally safe to eat as much as you want, whenever you want.

The high water and fiber content in most fresh fruits and vegetables makes them hard to overeat. You'll feel full long before you've overdone it on the calories.

Eat vegetables raw or steamed, not fried or breaded, and dress them with herbs and spices or a little olive oil or cheese for flavor.

Add nuts and cheese to salads but don't overdo it. Use low-fat salad dressings, such as a vinaigrette made with olive oil.

Pour a little less cereal into your morning bowl to make room for some blueberries, strawberries, or sliced bananas. You'll still enjoy a full bowl, but with a lower calorie count.

Swap out some of the meat and cheese in your sandwich with healthier veggie choices like lettuce, tomatoes, sprouts, cucumbers, and avocado.

Instead of a high-calorie snack, like chips and dip, try baby carrots or celery with hummus.

Add more veggies to your favorite main courses to make your dish “go” further. Even dishes such as pasta and stir-fries can be diet-friendly if you use less noodles and more vegetables.

Try starting your meal with a salad or soup to help fill you up, so you eat less of your entrée.

### **Healthy dieting and weight loss tip #5: Indulge without overindulging**

#### **Try not to think of certain foods as "off limits"**

When you ban certain foods, it is natural to want those foods more, and then feel like a failure if you give in to temptation. Instead of denying yourself the unhealthy foods you love, simply eat them less often.

If you’ve ever found yourself polishing off a pint of ice cream or stuffing yourself with cookies or chips after spending a whole day virtuously eating salads, you know how restrictive diet plans usually end. Deprivation diets set you up for failure: you starve yourself until you snap, and then you overdo it, cancelling out all your previous efforts.

In order to successfully lose weight and keep it off, you need to learn how to enjoy the foods you love without going overboard. A diet that places all your favorite foods off limits won’t work in the long run. Eventually, you’ll feel deprived and will cave. And when you do, you probably won’t stop at a sensible-sized portion.

#### **Tips for enjoying treats without overeating**

Combine your treat with other healthy foods. You can still enjoy your favorite high-calorie treat, whether it’s ice cream, chips, cake, or chocolate. The key is to eat a smaller serving along with a lower-calorie option. For example, add strawberries to your ice cream or munch on carrot and celery sticks along with your chips and dip. By piling on the low-cal option, you can eat a diet-friendly portion of your favorite treat without feeling deprived.



Schedule your treats. Establish regular times when you get to indulge in your favorite food. For example, maybe you enjoy a small square of chocolate every day after lunch, or a slice of cheesecake every Friday evening. Once you're conditioned to eat your treat at those times—and those times only—you'll stop obsessing about them at other times.

Make your indulgence less indulgent. Find ways to reduce fat, sugar, or calories in your favorite treats and snacks. If you do your own baking, cut back on sugar, making up for it with extra cinnamon or vanilla extract. You can also eliminate or reduce high-calorie sides, like whipped cream, cheese, dip, and frosting.

Engage all your senses—not just your taste sense. You can make snack time more special by lighting candles, playing soothing music, or eating outdoors in a beautiful setting. Get the most pleasure—and the most relaxation—out of your treat by cutting it into small pieces and taking your time.

### **Healthy dieting and weight loss tip #6: Take charge of your food environment**

Your weight loss efforts will succeed or fail based largely on your food environment. Set yourself up for success by taking charge of your food environment: when you eat, how much you eat, and what foods are available.

Eat early, weigh less. When you eat—as well as how much—may also affect your weight. Early studies suggest that consuming more of your daily calories at breakfast and fewer at dinner can help you drop more pounds. Eating a larger, healthy breakfast can jump start your metabolism, stop you feeling hungry during the day, and give you more time to burn off the calories.

Serve yourself smaller portions. One easy way to control portion size is by using small plates, bowls, and cups. This will make your portions appear larger. Don't eat out of large bowls or directly from the food container or package, which makes it difficult to assess how much you've eaten. Using smaller utensils, like a teaspoon instead of tablespoon, can slow eating and help you feel full sooner.

Plan your meals and snacks ahead of time. You will be more inclined to eat in moderation if you have thought out healthy meals and snacks in advance. You can buy or create your own small portion snacks in plastic bags or containers. Eating on a schedule will also help you avoid eating when you aren't truly hungry.



Cook your own meals. Cooking meals at home allows you to control both portion size and what goes in to the food. Restaurant and packaged foods generally contain a lot more sodium, fat, and calories than food cooked at home—plus the portion sizes tend to be larger.

Don't shop for groceries when you're hungry. Create a shopping list and stick to it. Be especially careful to avoid high-calorie snack and convenience foods.

Out of sight, out of mind. Limit the amount of tempting foods you have at home. If you share a kitchen with non-dieters, store snack foods and other high-calorie indulgences in cabinets or drawers out of your sight.

Fast for 14 hours a day. Try to eat your last meal earlier in the day and then fast until breakfast the next morning. Studies suggest that this simple dietary adjustment—eating only when you're most active and giving your digestive system a long break each day—may help you to lose weight.

### **Healthy dieting and weight loss tip #7: Make healthy lifestyle changes**

You can support your dieting efforts by making healthy lifestyle choices.

Get plenty of exercise. Exercise is a dieter's best friend. It not only burns calories, but also can improve your resting metabolism. No time for a long workout? Research shows that three 10-minute spurts of exercise per day are just as good as one 30-minute workout.

Turn off the TV. You actually burn less calories watching television than you do sleeping! If you simply can't miss your favorite shows, get a little workout in while watching. Do easy exercises like squats, sit-ups, jogging in place, or using resistance bands or hand weights.

Drink more water. Reduce your daily calorie intake by replacing soda, alcohol, or coffee with water. Thirst can also be confused with hunger, so by drinking water, you may avoid consuming extra calories.